

Dock Fishing – Keeping Score

By Bernard Williams, Magnolia Crappie Club



Introduction

I would like to start this article by stating a well-known fact, “Docks can hold crappie year round if they have the right water level and structure”. Now you can take my word or you can try it for yourself, but it’s a fact that crappie are attracted to docks and piers.

At my home lake of Ross Barnett Reservoir in Madison MS, we have boat houses, piling piers, and floating piers. Most of the piling piers are decades old and they are loaded with man-made structure (i.e. trees, porcupines, stake-beds, brush-piles, and a new phenomenal product called a Moss Back Fish Rack). The boat houses have structure that’s placed on the outside edges; the floating piers may or may not contain structure. During winter when the lake is drawn down to winter-pool most of these docks are in 4 to 8 feet of water with some of the deeper boat house piers are in 12 to 15 feet of water.

The docks attract large schools of shad in the winter months and they bring in large schools of crappie. The crappie and shad begin their migration in the fall when the water temperature hits the 65 degree range and continue on through the winter months. The crappie like these docks for the following reasons:

- Docks provide shade. The water temperature may be a degree cooler or warmer underneath the docks.
- Docks develop algae, attracting bait fish and small game fish.

Many of the old-timers know from past experiences that this is the only place they need to fish to catch a mess of fish. In other words the docks become very crowded during these periods.

Equipment

10’ – B-n-M Buck's Best Ultra-Lite with Bottom Seat and Touch System Pole



10’ – The Difference - Rodger Gant Signature Pole



B-n-M Sharp Shooter (5.5ft) Pole & B-n-M Spinning Reel



B-n-M Quick-Change Crappie Reel

Vicious 4# or 6# High Vis Panfish Line

Bobby Garland Mo’Glo 1/16th or 1/32nd Jig Heads (Chartreuse Glo, Pink Glo, or Blue Glo)

Southern Pro Rattle Eye Jig Heads - 1/16th or 1/32nd (Black, Pink, Orange, Chart.)

Tubes:

- Southern Pro Crappie Stinger
- Bobby Garland 2.5” Sent Wiggl’R
- Bobby Garland 2.25” Minnow Mind’R
- Bobby Garland Mo’Glo Baby Shad

Berkley Crappie Nibbles
The Bait Pump
Minnows

Finding the Right Dock

Crappie are not attracted to every dock, if the dock is not in the proper location for that time of the year or the dock does not have the necessary structure, then fish will not hold under or around that dock. I will explain this as we go. For now we'll grade the docks and the ones with the highest points are the ones we will focus on. This is just one way we use to locate the prime docks. We have used this formula during every season and it works. You may have your own way but this is a good starting point when you have limited time to fish.

Dock Score

We'll setup our grading system (points) as followed:

1. Cover:
 - a. Submerged Wood – 10
 - b. Sunken Boats – 9.5
 - c. Moss Back Fish Rack - 9
 - d. Plastic (Porcupine Attractors) – 8
 - e. Weeds – 7
2. Cover Degree:
 - a. Medium – 10
 - b. Light Cover – 6
 - c. Heavy – 3
 - Fresh Cut Christmas Trees – Deduct (-3)
3. Dock Size:
 - a. Large (300ft or better) – 10
 - b. Large to Medium (200ft – 300ft) – 8
 - c. Medium (100ft – 200ft) – 6
 - d. Small (0ft – 100ft) – 4
4. Covered (10) – Open (6)
5. Sloping Ground (10) – Flat Ground (6)
6. Construction:
 - a. Wood Pilings – 10
 - b. Metal – 8
 - c. Plastic – 6
 - d. Styrofoam – 4
7. Surroundings:
 - a. Nearby Creek – 10
 - b. Ditch – 8
 - c. Humps – 6
8. Multiple Docks Around each other (10) – Isolated Dock (5)
9. Water Depth:
 - a. Deep Water (15ft or above) – 10
 - b. Mid-Depth (10ft – 15) – 9
 - c. Shallow to Mid-Depth (6ft to 10ft) – 8
 - d. Shallow Water (0ft – 6ft) – 6

10. Lighted Docks – (10)
11. Private Docks (10) – Public Docks (5)

The Grade

1. Prime Docks – 85 points or greater
2. Hotspot Docks – 70 to 85 points
3. Fishable Docks – 50 to 70 points
4. Seasonable Docks – 30 to 50 points
5. Hit or Miss Docks – 0 to 30 points

The Delivery (Presentation)

Now that we've found our prime docks we need to work on our presentation. We have several ways to attack our dock. We can shoot, cast, pitch, or vertical fishing the jig. Each approach has its merits. We also can use a combination of each. Don't forget we can use the old-fashion bobber and a minnow.

Dock Shooting

Perhaps the least used presentation method is dock shooting. Shooting docks is like shooting a bow and arrow, holding the pole in one hand and pulling the jig back in the other making a bow in the rod. With the bail open and holding the line with your index finger on the pole, release the jig and the line at the same time to "shoot" the jig under the dock. The B-n-M Sharpshooter is designed for this technique,



and this requires practice. It's something you can do on those cold days in the den with a rod, reel, jig and a can. Place the can about 8 to 10 feet away and try to shoot it in the can. As you get better make the can smaller and the distance longer.

I recommend Vicious 4# or 6# High-Vis Panfish Line, Bobby Garland Mo'Glo 1/32nd Jig Heads (Chartreuse Glo, Pink Glo, or Blue Glo) and the Southern Pro Crappie Stinger.

I have personally witnessed Kent Driscoll with B-n-M Poles pull up to a dock and win a tournament within two hours dock shooting while several of us were single pole jig fishing. It was astonishing to see the size fish come from 20' to 30' underneath that dock we had fished around all morning.

Casting and Pitching

Casting can be one another effective methods around docks for covering lots of area. Public docks have lots of cover placed in and around them. Casting allows you to reach this cover and fish it efficiently. I recommend the Difference Rod by Rodger Gant in a 10' length. This is a new product for B-n-M.



I like to use a mixture of road-runners and curly tails to cover as much ground as possible. Once you pinpoint the fish then you can continue casting or if they are with reach you may want to switch to a vertical approach.

I recommend Vicious 4# or 6# High-Vis Panfish Line, Blakemore Road-Runners (Glow) in 1/32nd Southern Pro Curly Tails or Bobby Garland Slab-Slay-R.

Vertical or Jig Fishing

Vertical fishing or jigging around these docks has many advantages. We keep the jig in the strike zone much longer than shooting, casting or pitching. When we place that jig in an area of the dock and hold it there it will not take long to determine if there are any fish in the area. This technique can be done by standing on the dock or from a boat. I've found it to be more effective when done on the dock. I use the B-n-M Bottom Seat Touch System Jig Pole in 10' length. The shorter pole allows the user to maneuver into tight spaces.



I recommend Vicious 4# or 6# High-Vis Panfish Line, Bobby Garland Mo'Glo 1/32nd Jig Heads (Chartreuse Glo, Pink Glo, or Blue Glo) and the Southern Pro Crappie Stinger and the Bobby Garland Baby Shad.

Boat Control

Boat control is of the up-most importance, if we bump the pilings we have just defeated our purpose. We have found that dock fish are very spooky. Noise, banging boats causes the crappie to scatter. We are trying to sneak in and out without them know we're there. If it's possible both people should fish from the front of the boat and work different areas until a pattern is established.

No Noise

Another little trick we use to eliminate the noise to turn all our electronic and live-wells off. We use our trolling motor as little as possible. All these devices make noise and vibrations, thus it causes the fish to move out. We also keep the talking to a minimum, sometimes we even use hand signals.

Private Docks

Please remember that docks are private property unless they were placed there by the state. Respect the owners. Some of these owners spend upwards of \$150,000 building their docks, so please have some respect when you see people fishing or relaxing on them, respect their space and don't fish this spot. Never get out and trespass on docks, stay in your boat, the water belongs to everyone the dock belongs to the owner.

Lighted Docks

Lighted docks are great places to fish any time of the year and anytime of the day, do not pass these by without at least checking. The lights attract swarms, and swarms of bugs and insects. These insects are the beginning of the crappie food chain. As the bugs begin to swarm the bait fish are attracted to the bugs, the more bait fish begin to congregate the more game fish begin to congregate until the feeding begins. We've been known to use the submersible fishing lights to attract the bait fish. Using a light takes several hours at night for the bite to start, but when it does hold on. You can catch lots of fish by employing a light.

Build Your Own Hot-Spots



Docks hold fish for one or two reasons: (1) natural structure (wood piers or creeks underneath), (2) man-made structure (brush-piles, stake-beds or fish attractors). As I mentioned earlier there is a new product on the market that is really getting a lot of attention as far as fish attractors go. Each MossBack Fish Rack is made from a length of 4-inch diameter PVC pipe with plastic V-shaped strips that slide through slits in the 4-inch pipe. When assembled, it looks like a tree with a plastic trunk and green artificial branches. The branch strips are rough in texture to promote algae growth. That attracts bait fish like shad. The bait fish bring in the game fish that anglers seek. Each attractor has a cable that attaches to a concrete block that sinks the attractor. Dock owners can attach the cable to the dock to hang the attractors vertically in the water. The algae promoting feature allows the Fish Rack to begin attracting algae as soon as it is placed in the water. Fish are attracted to this structure within hours.

This is what people around the country say about this product.

Sinking whole trees can be rough, dangerous work. "I almost killed myself. I fell out of the boat one day when the branch of a sinking tree caught my shirt by the back of the neck, The Fish Rack is safe to deploy and less cumbersome.". David King, MossBack Fish Rack

Unusual Methods

Our crappie club, Magnolia Crappie Club held a tournament on Eagle Lake near Vicksburg MS a few weeks ago. We had practiced for two days trying to find fish. The fish we found was around the deep water piers with a moderate amount of cover. My partner Don Terry of Jackson and I decided we had found the "hottest dock", so we moved out after catching about 8 to 10 "specks" (black crappie) on Friday. Saturday morning a high-pressure front with high wind moved in and caused the fish to move. We tried each of the brush-piles we had caught fish on the day before but only fish we could locate was ones holding close to the pilings and they were small fish.

Another club team (Hugh Krutz and Steve Stevenson) found a dock down the lake from us that held good fish (2lbs). Their technique was to lay down flat in the boat and push as far underneath the pier as possible and fish a minnow and bobber on their bellies with one pole each. I must say this is very unusual but it worked to perfection. The front had pushed the crappie to the back of the pier and tight to cover. They took the bobbers, a lite wire hook and the smallest minnow in the bucket to catch the winning stringer. Sometimes it takes unorthodox methods to get the job done and this was one of those times.

Conclusion

I do not profess to be a dock expert. However, by employing some of the tactics and methods mention anyone can improve their catch ratio when the fish move into the docks. With patience and persistence your dock fishing experience can become a successful and productive fishing trip. Last but not least, remember to take a kid fishing.